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MARRIAGE IS NOT A PRIVATE AFFAIR

**MIXED MARRIAGES AMONGST HINDU NEPALI
MIGRANT COAL MINERS AND CHRISTIAN KHASI
WOMEN IN MEGHALAYA**



**Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
Proverbs 1:7**

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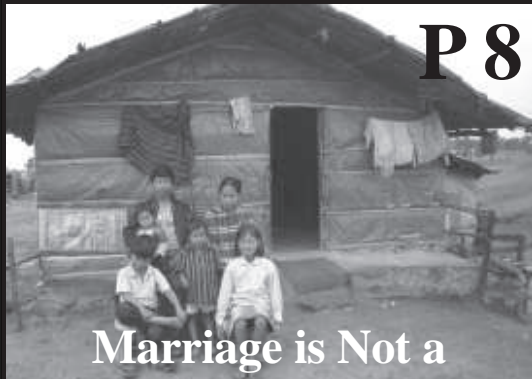
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Patriarchal and Hindu Nepali migrant coalminers marry matriarchal and Christian Khasi indigenous women in India's Meghalaya state.. writes Dinesh Wagle

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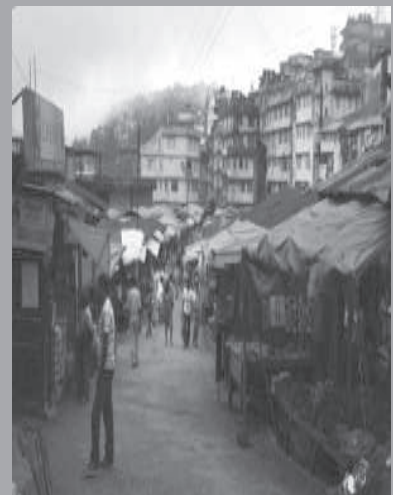


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BUT WHO ULTIMATELY IS THE LOSER?

Of the scores of essays I have read on this subject, the one written by Ted Gurr, titled "People Versus States, Minorities at risk in the New Century," stands out as an exceptional piece of writing, not just from the view point of the meticulous research put in but more so for his extremely rational thinking and perspective.

Of course the essay is pretty exhaustive and packed with data and analysis which a casual reader may find too heavy to digest but one point that he makes in this presentation is that "Economic inequality is one of the prime reasons for any separatist movement, the world over." He observes that Groups which are subjected to economic discrimination or deprivation are more likely to launch a movement for separation from the parent state, than groups which enjoy economical parity.

His observations hold much truth in the case of the Gorkha community's quest to separate from Bengal.

Years of neglect and economic disparity has led the situation to be what it is today. The crumbling tourist infrastructure, the deplorable condition of our roads, the failing Health Care System, the tight water situation are enough proof of the economic neglect and apathy that the successive State Governments have dished out to the Darjeeling Hills. The resentment of the residents of the Darjeeling Hills was manifested by the two agitations, one led by Mr. Subhas Ghosing and the current one under the leadership of Mr. Bimal Gurung, that succeeded, in a partial way, to loosen the purse strings that the State and Central Government were holding on to ever so tightly. Whether or not the two agitations actually managed to provide any solace to the masses is matter for debate but what is without any iota of doubt is the fact that in the last 25 years since Subhas Ghosing launched the first Gorkhaland movement in 1986,

the inflow of Government funding into the Darjeeling Area has increased many folds from what it was pre 1986.

With the hundreds of crores in Indian Currency that were pumped into the Darjeeling District, the economic expectations of the people of the Darjeeling Hills too increased. The economic health seemed to be on the rise- the Tourism Industry finally looked to revive itself, so did the Tea Industry. The Tourist started to flock back into the Queen

of Hills even if just to be confronted by a Darjeeling which was just a mere shadow of its glorious past. But yes, overall the scenario was getting better. Hopes of the long deprived people of the Darjeeling Hills was being revived and dreams of better days flashed in the minds of the Hills residents.

But dreams are just that- dreams.... especially if the dream maker are as inept as like ours. They led us to believe that the next dream would be the most beautiful we have ever seen but when the eyes closed and the dreams started, its no better than the trailer of

a 'C' grade Bollywood sizzler. It always started with David taking on Goliath- daring him, defying him, challenging him and mocking him but the dream inevitably ended each time with David making a meek surrender and with David not making good any of his earlier bravado.

All that the dreams do was that the public lost valuable man hours and the economy of the Hills took a further beating. By making the Dooars the latest issue and an area of conflict, another tourist season has taken a beating. The tourism industries dream of finally doing some good business this season ended up in flames – literally like the houses and cars in Bagrakote. Bookings in hotels and resorts across the Hills saw en-mass cancellations while those tourist who were already enjoying their holidays here, had to make a sudden dash for Siliguri due to the flash Highway strikes called by the GJMM and its supporting parties in the Dooars and Terai. Our



Tourists leaving the Hills before a Strike

leadership somehow behaves a bit like Kalidas-chopping off the very branch atop which they have poised their bottom-most asset- we cannot afford to kill the golden goose which in our case is Tourism. By resorting to wild cat strikes we are doing more harm than good in the long run. Separate State or not, we still will require Tourism to help sustain the Hill economy. The Hills can ill afford to continue bleeding its main source of economy and yet hope to continue existing especially since now even GTA is looking like a dream gone bad.

The Hills can ill afford any further disruptions, especially during tourist seasons. The once bustling hill economy cannot further withstand the economical blow that Bandhs tend to deliver. The recent blockading of the National Highways by Bandh supporters delivered a crippling blow to the hospitality industry in the Hills. Tourists who had once again started flocking the Darjeeling Hills sped back to the safe confines of their hotel rooms in Siliguri preferring to spend the rest of their holidays there rather than risk being stranded. The bottom line is- who ultimately ends up on their bare backs, looking the joker in the eyes of the world- We-!!!

Our loss is Siliguri's gain- their hotels run chock-a block, their restaurants are packed all day, their transporters laugh their way to the bank- while we in the Hills can do nothing but wait another season. Why just the Tourism Industry, the day is not far when Siliguri will overtake even our Education Industry. With dozens of new Schools now being opened in Siliguri, the day is not too far off when outstation students would prefer to go to the Schools of Siliguri rather than venturing into the uncertain conditions in the Hills. This trend has already started and is growing at an alarming rate. Earlier, students from the Dooars and the North Bengal region formed a large chunk of outstation students community in the Darjeeling Hills. This is not the case any more. They prefer to remain in the safer and more stable conditions of the Siliguri Schools rather than climbing up to the Hills. If the Political instability continues, the Education Industry which provided economic solace to thousands of people in the Hills will soon start facing problems.

The fact is that the GJM leadership has once again been charmed into a hole. The earlier Left Front Government bullied and pushed the GJM into a corner and forced it into accepting the GTA while the present TMC Government courted the GJM leadership like a lover would but ultimately charmed and cajoled them into the same hole that the Left Front Government

had dug. The strategy of both the LF and TMC government are the same-not allowing the GJM even a toe hold in the Dooars. The earlier Buddhadev Bhattacharya led government precipitated Sibchu, the current Mamta Banerjee led government created Bagrakotte. Only the names have changed though the motive has been the same. The strategy of the State Government, both past and present, remain the same. Not allowing the GJM and its allies to hold even a simple public meeting in the Dooars smacks of double standards on the part of the administration. Yet the GJM leadership swears by Mamta's *mamta* for the Hills. I just hope that the GJM leadership realizes that their credibility and their "*izzat*" is our "*izzat*" and each time they back off or loose credibility-the entire Hills become the laughing stock.

Frankly, despite what may be politically correct to say, the fact is that the State Government by no means will concede to the GJM demand for the inclusion of 199 mouzas each of Dooars and Terai. Justice Shymal Sen, may or may not table his reports in June, but whenever he does, it is sure to set either the Hills or Dooars on fire. The leadership of both the camps appear to stand rigid on their "*Hum eek inch nahi chorenge*" rhetoric hence a stand off is but expected whenever the good Justice tables his report.

It is high time now that the leadership of both sides of the political divide exhibit some statesman like quality which will go a long way in lifting this part of the world from the social, political and financial doldrums it presently is in. The mainland of Bengal does not care a dime whether or not our Tourism Industry survives or our Education Industry sustains itself. In fact they probably would be happy if it does not, for the simple fact that if tourism fails here Digha and the few other places of tourist interest in mainland Bengal gains. Likewise if the Education Industry in the Hills takes a hit, Schools and Higher Education Institutes in places like Siliguri and Durgapur stand to gain. After all everyone needs a holiday and everyone needs an education. The fact is that the sights we provide for the tourists or the education we provide for the students are not indispensable. If the Darjeeling Hills cannot provide its guest a safe and relaxed holiday or if it cannot give its students the requisite environment to study, then they will move on..

So, who ultimately loses???? ☐

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HERITAGE

JR Minto

Extracted from
Graham of Kalimpong

THE HISTORY OF DR GRAHAM AND THE HOMES

Nestling in a 500 acre estate in the side of the thickly wooded Deolo hill at an elevation of 4,600 ft. and overlooking the town of Kalimpong to the south, is the picturesque setting of Dr. Graham's Homes School. To the north, lie the majestic Himalayas dominated by the eternally snow-clad peak of Kanchenjunga (28,185 ft.) a mere 60 km distant, and the borders of Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet.

In 1900, this now, beautiful estate was little more than a barren hill side. The Founder, the Rev. Dr. John Anderson

Graham felt the need for providing care and training for destitute Eurasian and Anglo-Indian children, who under the appalling circumstances prevailing at the time, appeared doomed to a most miserable existence, with no hope for the future. It was with this thought in mind and the vision and enthusiasm of a born pioneer, that Graham of Kalimpong took into his care six small children. These were housed in a rented building," Kierander " , some distance from the present site; the date September 24th, 1900 - a day that has meant almost everything to some 8,000 children who have passed through these Homes in the 108 years of its existence.

It was from this humble beginning that Dr. Graham embarked on the project of constructing and developing the institution we now know as Dr. Graham's Homes - so renamed in memory of our Founder who died on May 15th, 1942.

In those early days few could have believed that the next two decades would see such incredible expansion - the growth of cottages housing 800 children, a school, a farmstead, a workshop and playing fields. But the closing months of 1900 were difficult times. Money was desperately needed, and a further 20 children were expected in the new year. Appeals, though widely advertised, yielded a total sum of Rs. 4373-9 annas at the close of the financial year. However, supported and encouraged by Sir John Woodburn, Late Governor of Bengal, and the Hon'ble J.A. Bourdillon, the first President of the Homes, Dr. Graham ordered work to commence on the first cottage-appropriately named "Woodburn Cottage". The foundation stone was laid by the President on the 8th November, 1900, the building fund at this time stood at Rs. 1.257-3 annas.



From this simple though positive start, Dr. Graham and the Board of Management launched on a campaign of publicity and appeal. Although a Scottish Committee had been formed, it was felt that Local Committees in India would aid the considerable task of raising fund. Consequently in December 1901, committees were formed in Kanpur and Allahabad. Though

these are now defunct, committees founded mainly through the efforts of ex-students & staff now function in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada & Japan.

GIFTED COMPANION: GENTLE COORDINATOR

While well-designed and well-built cottages and school buildings, as well as the provision of adequate finance to run a residential school for some 600 children, are each in themselves a major project, the procurement of suitable personnel to man the twenty cottage homes, is in itself, a major responsibility. The selection of such staff and the subsequent co-ordination of their activities with the general policy of the institution, was largely the domain of Katherine Graham, who was no less a leader than her husband. For

two whole decades, till her almost premature death in 1919 at the age of 58, Mrs. Graham acted as Chief Liaison Officer between the several scores of workers, both welfare and academic, who were drawn from almost every corner of the Commonwealth of Nations, including India. Another aspect of the “integrated cosmopolitanism” that flourished under the leadership of John and Katherine Graham was the truly ecumenical nature of the staff, whose denomination affiliations, in their variety, were almost legion.

CROWNED WITH HONOURS

John Anderson Graham, who survived his devoted companion by almost a quarter of a century (1919-1942), lived to receive many honours, both from the Church to which he belonged (the Presbyterian Church of Scotland) as well as from the State. At a somewhat early stage (1921) in his distinguished missionary career, the Presbyterian Church in India made him a moderator - the Presbyterian equivalent of a Bishop and in 1931 he was appointed the Moderator of the entire Presbyterian communion which has its ecumenical seat in Edinburgh. Dr. J.A. Graham was the only missionary in India ever to have been elected to the highest ecclesiastical office in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The premier universities of Scotland, namely Edinburgh and Aberdeen, bestowed on him their doctorates of divinity, the former in 1903 and the latter in 1931. Amazingly he had found time to write some very learned and informative volumes on anthropological and philosophical subjects. The recognition of his services by the Government of India took the form of a bestowal of (1) the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal in 1903, (2) the Companion of the Indian Empire in 1911, and (3) in 1935, a Bar to the original Gold Medal of 1903.

THE HOMAGE OF THE PEOPLE

Royalty as well as the elite showed him the respect due to his character, as well as his



Dr. J.A. Graham was the only missionary in India ever to have been elected to the highest ecclesiastical office in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The premier universities of Scotland, namely Edinburgh and Aberdeen, bestowed on him their doctorates of divinity, the former in 1903 and the latter in 1931



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achievements. But it was the “sovereign people” who, along with the privileged elite and aristocracy, turned out in their multiple thousands to render their reverential homage to the memory of the departed guru (teacher) as his mortal remains were taken in mournful procession along the hillside roads of the town which he had largely called into being. The beautiful little cemetery of the Homes was made the final resting place of the body of Dr. Graham, as of his wife, just 23 years before. But both of them are enshrined in the hearts, not only of the hill folk of the Darjeeling district, but of men and women throughout the English-speaking world who were blessed, in one way or another, by the persons of these saints.

DEVOTED COLLEAGUE

No account of the work of Dr. Graham would be complete without due mention of the contribution to the sustained success of the St. Andrew's Homes which was made by Mr. James Purdie. During one of his brief furloughs in Scotland in 1908, Dr. Graham met Mr. Purdie on the suggestion of one of Calcutta's merchant princes. An ardent social welfare worker and Bible scholar, Purdie was a man after Graham's own heart. No burra sahib's salary led Mr. Purdie to accept, in 1908, the founder's offer of the secretaryship of the Homes. When Dr. Graham passed away in 1942, Mr. Purdie succeeded him as Superintendent of St. Andrew's Homes, shortly to be renamed after Dr. Graham. His span of devoted service to the institution was a worthy 45 1/2 years!

He along with two of Dr. Graham's daughters, Mrs. Odling and Mrs. Sherriff, were the leading authorities on the life and work of John and Katherine Graham. If not one of the “founding fathers” of Kalimpong, James Purdie was certainly one of the chief factors in the sound and successful management of the Institution that owes its origin to the intellectual and spiritual genius of John Anderson Graham. □

Meghalaya

Marriage is Not a Private Affair

By Dinesh Wagle

Patriarchal and Hindu Nepali migrant coalminers marry matriarchal and Christian Khasi indigenous women in India's Meghalaya state. Read on to find out what happen.....

Marriages, history shows us, are often tactical arrangements between rulers to expand empires, strengthen political alliances, establish peace between warring nations, avoid wars or create harmony in a conflict-ridden society. The Romans did it, the Mughals followed suit, and Nepal's rulers were no different, in the seventh century marrying off Princess Bhrikuti to powerful emperor Songtsan Gampo of Tibet. Similarly, in the eighth century, King Jayadev II of Nepal brought home Rajyamati, daughter of Harshavardan, the king of Kamrup, Assam.

In contrast, when Kul Bahadur Magar, a Nepali coalmine worker in an area of Meghalaya that borders Kamrup, married Deng, a local ethnic Khasi woman, he did not have lofty goals of alliance building or peace-making. "Who thinks like that?" asked 45-year-old Magar. "I liked her, she liked me. We were both young and one day we

married." That was 13 years ago. Since then, the couple has been living peacefully in a shack with their four children, near the coalmine where Magar works. But their peace has now been shattered. The simmering mistrust between Nepali-speakers and the local Khasi



Kul Bahadur with his family

community erupted into full-scale conflict during the course of May. Several Gorkhas (Nepali-speaking Indians) and migrants from Nepal were killed, the tragedies highlighting the constant vulnerability of both categories of Nepali-speaking residents of the Northeast.

Two years ago an ethnic conflict arose in a small town called Barsora in East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, a north-eastern Indian state. The Khasis who are majority in the state that has other indigenous communities like Garos and Jaintias, started evicting Nepali migrant labourers who toiled in the coal mines there. A group of leading Nepali migrants from Ladrampai, the commercial hub of neighbouring Jaintai Hills district, went there to hold talks with the locals. Locals had four complaints against migrants: 1. You steal our jobs. 2. You consume alcohol and create

nuisance at public places. 3. You are involved in terrorist activities. 4. You marry our women and help destroy our culture.

"The land here belongs to you; the mines are yours, men from your community need cheap labour and they hire poor Nepalis," the migrant leaders replied, according to Toplal Bhandari, chairman of the Ladrampai unit of Mool Pravaha Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekata Samaj. "No Nepalis are allowed to sell liquor here. These are men from your community who own and run liquor shops. No Nepalis are involved in terrorist activities and terrorism is not ethnicity-specific. In fact, Nepalis secure your borders, let alone the thought of them harming India. As for Nepali men destroying your culture by marrying your women, why don't you look at the issue from this angle that yours is a matriarchal society where men have no ownership of properties, therefore, Nepalis never get hold of any of the properties that your women own. Instead, they serve your women till they become old and one day they are kicked out of their 'homes' to go back to Nepal where they have nothing. They are treated as if they were date expired medicine."

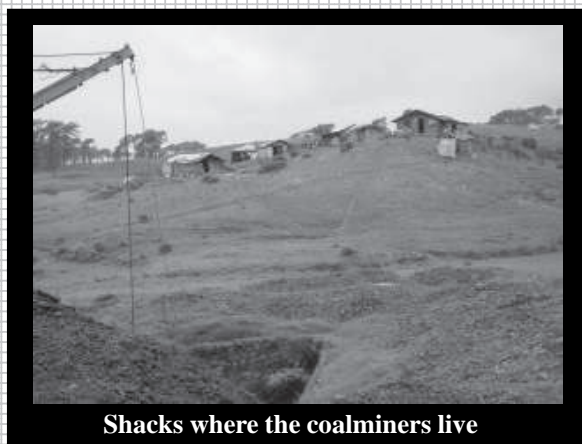
In the family of the matriarchal Khasis and Garos (another ethnic community of Meghalaya with whom Nepalis enjoy relatively warm relations) women are the authority. The youngest daughter inherits the property from

her mother. The child bears mother's surname and in some cases the husband, who moves into his wife's house after marriage to look after the family, changes his surname to his wife's. If the man is Hindu, like many Nepalis and Gorkhas, he will have to convert to Christianity. (They are usually given surname Dakhar, a Khasi word that also means foreigner. "A Nepali Brahman has become Burman," said a Gorkha.)

Some Khasi men complain of 'female hegemony' just as women do of male supremacy in patriarchal society like Nepali. In his *New York Times* article of February 18, 1994 Syed Zubair Ahmed had written that a men's right organization had been founded in Meghalaya to look after the interests of men. Alleging women as overbearing and dominating, according to the article, the men complained: "We are sick of playing the roles of breeding bulls and babysitters. We have no lines of succession. We have no land, no business." On the other hand, women say that they prefer to marry outsiders- like Nepalis- because their own tribesmen tend to be irresponsible in family matters. The only domain that completely belongs to men in Meghalaya is politics and governance. No woman has ever become chief minister of the state.

Against the said background the Nepali argument seems convincing (a Nepali man was recently kicked out by his Khasi wife) but, to be honest, that is not the only truth. There are many instances of cunning Nepalis using the marriage with a Khasi woman as means to enter into the business and make money. In some cases Khasi women, on their part, take commission from their Nepali husbands. "I wanted

to do timber business," said an elderly Gorkha in Shillong who didn't want to be identified as the issue was too embarrassing for him. "I had no option but to marry a Khasi woman." A few years after the marriage the Meghalaya government banned the extraction of timber that rendered the marriage useless for this Gorkha. He then married a Nepali woman from Nepal. He has a daughter with the Khasi women and some more kids with the Nepali wife. He said he didn't stay for long in his Khasi wife's home. "We still have contact," he said. "But we hardly meet. She is happy with her own life and I am happy with mine."



Shacks where the coalminers live

Many Nepalis or Gorkhas who are staying in their Khasi wives' homes in Meghalaya find it very difficult to admit so. To admit that they are living the life of a *ghar jwain* under the authority of a woman is a matter of humiliation for them who were born and raised in a patriarchal setup, some Gorkhas and Nepalis of Meghalaya who haven't married Khasi women told me.

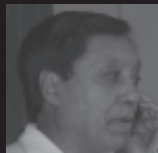
But not all become *ghar jwains*. Opposite has happened in Kul Bahadur Magar's case. The Magar couple has been living in a shack near a coal mine where Magar works. Deng's mother, who lives in a different village, is too poor to own a house.

Some Nepalis have taken their Khasi wives to Nepal where they are living a peaceful life. One such woman, by the way, wrote to me after reading an article that I wrote for the

Kathmandu Post (Meghalaya Diary). She introduced herself as 'a daughter of Meghalaya and daughter-in law of Nepal'. Just as Nepalis mistakenly brand all Khasis and Jaintias as *gaikhane* (beef eaters), she said, Khasis also wrongly put migrant Nepalis and Gorkhas in the same basket. When Khasis become angry with Nepalis or Gorkhas they don't differentiate between those who are married to Khasi women and those who aren't.

People like Kul Bahadur Magar and Deng also appear to have concluded that their marriage alone cannot bring the two communities together. After the current unrest, the couple has been rethinking the wisdom of continuing to live in their shack near the coalmine. "Our daughters are growing," said Magar, "and it is becoming difficult for them to live here. The Khasi target them as they are the children of a woman who 'went for a dakhar' – the Khasi word for foreigner. 'Deng', in fact, is just a nickname that means 'second daughter' in Khasi, as her formal name is Goma. In fact, she is a Hindu, the daughter of a Nepali man (a Tamang from Ramechhap, Nepal) and a Khasi woman. Because of the growing insecurity, Deng, who speaks fluent Nepali, is now insisting that the family move to Nepal, where Magar continues to own ancestral land. "I didn't think I would go to Nepal," said Magar. 'But now I am thinking about it.' □

Wagle
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OPINION

Bhawani S.
Bagdas

RESTORATION OF THE DARJEELING ZILLA PARISHAD AND ITS CONSTITUTIONAL BOTTLENECK

Let alone the creation of Gorkhaland, the erst while Left Front Government, on the contrary, had a hidden agenda to split the district of Darjeeling to facilitate the forming of a separate district of Siliguri, after merging with it the adjoining contiguous areas of the Rajgunj block of the Jalpiaguri district and also some areas of Islampur Subdivision of the North Dinajpur district.... writes Bhawani S. Bagdas

Notwithstanding the relevant provisions enshrined in the Indian Constitution for the creation of new states; the political leadership cutting across the party lines in Bengal has ruled out, more often than not, the possibility of further division of West Bengal, implying that a separate state of Gorkhaland would not be carved out of the boundaries of the state.

Let alone the creation of Gorkhaland, the erst -while Left Front Government, on the contrary, had a hidden agenda to split the district of Darjeeling to facilitate the forming of a separate district of Siliguri, after merging with it the adjoining contiguous areas of the Rajgunj block of the Jalpiaguri district and also some areas of Islampur Subdivision of the North Dinajpur district. The fact of the matter is that for almost all the administrative purposes, the then Left Front Govt had treated Siliguri as a defacto district headquarters. The head offices of the most of the engineering departments of this district are located not in the Darjeeling Sardar Subdivision but are in Siliguri. A few glaring cases in point are the naming of Siliguri Sub divisional Hospital as the Siliguri District Hospital and the location of the office of the District Controller of Food and Supplies Department, known as the office of the District Controller of Darjeeling district at Siliguri. Apart from this, the former MLA and cabinet Minister from Siliguri had allegedly whipped up the sectarian sentiments of a section of the majority community there for formulation of public opinion in favour of formation of a separate district of Siliguri. As a sequel to this, some communal outfits like Amra Bangali and Bangla Basha Bachao Samity started demanding division of the district for formation of a separate district of Siliguri. Moreover, to curry favour among the voters of the plains BJP leadership from Siliguri also made the same demand.

The motive of the then Bengal govt behind this move was to pre-empt any future action taken through PIL (Public Interest Litigation) in the Supreme/ High courts by the people of the hills to enable such courts in taking immediate cognizance of the matter for declaring the Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad as an unconstitutional Organization; which it has been

since May 1994 as per the implications of the Articles 243 B (1) and 243 N. of the Constitution. In order to have a clear understanding of such implications, the relevant articles are cited here under. The Articles 243 B (1) states: "There shall be constituted in every state, panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels in accordance with the provisions of this Part." (Part IX of the Constitution). The existence of the Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad has violated the letter and spirit of the above articles; because the Parishad is neither a Panchayat at the village level nor at the intermediate level at which there are four Panchayat Samities in the Siliguri Subdivision. Again it can't be considered as a panchayat at the district level too.

The Article 243-N states:- "Notwithstanding anything in this part, any provision of any law relating to Panchayats in force in a state immediately before the commencement of Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992, which is inconsistent with the provisions of this Part, shall continue to be in force until amended or repealed by a competent Legislature or other competent authority or until the expiry of one year from such commencement, whichever is earlier: Provided that all the Panchayats existing immediately before such

commencement shall continue till the expiry of their duration, unless sooner dissolved by a resolution passed to that effect by the Legislative Assembly of that state or, in the case of a state having a Legislative Council, by each House of the Legislature of that state.”

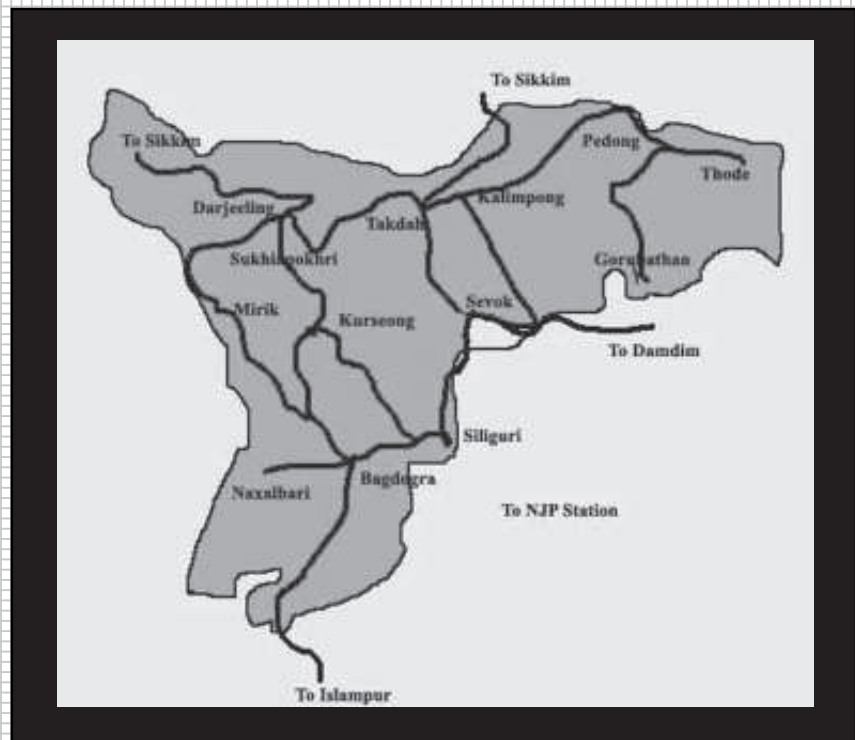
Even the provision to the Article 243-N. of the Constitution provides that the continuance of the Mahakuma Parishad could have been constitutionally valid till the expiration of its tenure. This mean the existence of the Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad could have been constitutionally valid for five years, i.e. duration of its first term. The first election to the Mahakuma Parishad was held in May 1989. Thus it was a constitutional body till May 1994 only. Thereafter it has been functioning as an unconstitutional body for almost eighteen years.

In view of the above circumstances, the Left Front Govt was keen on declaring Siliguri as a separate district. However, the prevailing political condition was not favourable for the govt. As a result, the State Government could not dare to take recourse to such a drastic move; as it had an apprehension of having a strong political backlash from the hills. Such was the political situation which prevailed prior to the signing of the Tripartite Agreement on the 18th July, 2011 and the subsequent enactment of the GTA Act by the State Legislature.

Of late, the Mamta Banerjee government does not seem to have any proposal to split the Darjeeling district to form a separate Siliguri district; otherwise it could have done so while approving the proposal by its cabinet to split at least five populous districts of Bengal for forming five more small districts to make their administration more convenient and manageable.

Meanwhile, the political scenario has been completely changed. Following the installation of the new government led by Mamta Banerjee and also supported by the GJM; prolonged negotiations started for finding a solution to the Darjeeling problems. After threadbare discussions with two top bureaucrats at the Writers Building, the GJM leadership agreed to accept an administrative set-up. As a consequence, Tripartite Agreement was signed between the Centre, State Government and the GJM on the 18th of July 2011 at Pintail Village, Siliguri. If we read between the lines and analyze the provisions of the Tripartite Agreement; it transpires that the introduction of the three tier Panchayats will be a landmark of this Agreement. As per the relevant provision of the Agreement, both the Central and the State governments have committed in writing that the three-tier Panchayats would be introduced.

In order to introduce the three-tier Panchayats, the Darjeeling Zilla Parishad should be restored. To restore the Zilla Parishad Sub-Article 3 (a) (b) of the Article 243-M of the



Constitution and the sections 185-A (1) (2) of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 have to be deleted from the Constitution and the Act respectively. For the purpose of clear understanding the relevant articles of the Constitution and the sections of the Panchayat Act, 73 are cited below: The Article 243 M. (3) states; “nothing in this part –

(a) relating to Panchayats at the district level shall apply to the Hill areas of the District of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists under any law for the time being in force:

(b) Shall be construed to affect the functions and powers of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council constituted under such law”.

Section 185-A(1) (2) were inserted in the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 73 by amending the Panchayat Act in 1988 itself when the DGHC Act 1988 was enacted in the State Assembly. The Section 185-A(1) states- “ with effect from the date of coming into office of the Council, the Zilla Parishad for the district of Darjeeling constituted under this Act shall stand dissolved and the members of Zilla Parishad shall be deemed to have vacated their offices forthwith.”

185- A (2) “Upon such dissolution of Zilla Parishad, the Council shall exercise all the powers, discharge all the duties and perform all the functions of the Zilla Parishad under this Act.”

However, to restore the Darjeeling Zilla Parishad, deletion of the above Articles and the Sections can be effected through amendment of the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the West Bengal Panchayat Act in parliament and the State Assembly respectively. But still the inconsistency lies in the fact that even after amending the relevant articles and the sections; the Zilla Parishad cannot be restored.

As per the interpretation of the Article 243- B (1) of the Constitution, it is implied that the restored Zilla Parishad shall have legal jurisdiction over the whole Panchayat areas of the District. Such jurisdiction of the Zilla Parishad shall not be selective jurisdiction over the panchayat

areas of the three Hill subdivisions only. Moreover, as per the relevant provisions of the GTA Act, the three-tier panchayats shall be introduced in the GTA region; subject to the provision under Part IX of the Constitution. But the article 243-b (1) of the Constitution clearly states that the Panchayat for the district can be formed at the district level only. Again the Bengal government cannot constitute Zilla Parishad at the GTA regional level.

In such a situation, constitutional bottleneck crops up and the Bengal govt will then be caught between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand, the Darjeeling Zilla Parishad has to be restored and on the other hand the State Government has to abolish the Mahakuma Parishad by deleting section 185-B (1) of the West Bengal Panchayat Act through amendment of the Act. But the Bengal government cannot afford to abolish Mahakuma Parishad, for such an action on the part of the state government would be politically suicidal and self defeating. In such adverse circumstances, the State Government will have no alternative but to split the district of Darjeeling to facilitate the creation of a separate district of Siliguri; so that the constitutional validity of the Mahakuma Parishad can be restored by converting it into Zilla Parishad of newly formed Siliguri district. As of now, it appears that unless and until the new district of Siliguri is formed by dividing the present Darjeeling District; the provision for introducing three tier Panchayati organizations in this district by restoring the

Darjeeling Zilla Parishad cannot be implemented. ☐

As of now, it appears that unless and until the new district of Siliguri is formed by dividing the present Darjeeling District; the provision for introducing three tier Panchayati organization in this district by restoring the Darjeeling Zilla Parishad cannot be implemented.

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10 Questions

**NARENDRA TAMANG,
DIRECTOR, KTV**



1. Your Childhood days...

My childhood was one of great struggle and sacrifice. I was born and brought up in a remote area of Kalimpong and even the basic amenities of life were lacking there. I was not much of an extrovert but then I was extremely interested in games, cultural and social activities.

2. What has your struggle taught you?

It has helped to bring the best out of me. My earlier struggle has held me in good stead and it helps me remain grounded in the present times. It is a constant reminder that there is no substitute for hard work.

3. Role of the media in Kalimpong

The Media in Kalimpong has been very proactive. It has helped mould the public opinion in Kalimpong in a big way. The Kalimpong media is more active than the media in any other town in the region and has earned a name for being unbiased and independent.

4. Reaction of Kalimpong to your work..

The reaction has been mostly positive so far. I consider myself lucky to have such a large support base which appreciates the work KTV is doing. I am happy and satisfied with the support I have received.

5. The best documentary that you have made..

There is no personal favourite as such. I put in equal hard work and dedication in all my works but then from the feedback that I receive, the documentary I made on the late Brain Moktan has received the most appreciation. My documentary on Tulsi Ghimerey too stands up there amongst my best works.

6. Your suggestion on making journalism better in Kalimpong

Basic training is very important. Seminars and workshops, conducted by veteran journalists should be held. Talented local youths must come forward and join the media so that there is an influx of new ideas and concepts.

7. Your role model/ inspiration

I have no role model as such but my inspiration is definitely my wife, Lalita, who has been with me through thick and thin.

8. Your ongoing projects..

I am on a mission to preserve the history of Kalimpong in a visual form. I have been working on this project for a long time and I know that since it is such a big project a lot of time and work is still required. I may not be able to complete it but at least I have made a beginning.

9. If you were not a journalist..

I wanted to be a Government Official but the situation and conditions at home were not too conducive. But I am satisfied and happy at what I am today. Another profession that interested me was Politics.

10. Some words for Himalayan Times

Himalayan Times is the oldest English magazine in the region and most definitely the boldest. It is a trendsetter and most importantly totally unbiased in its writings. Over a period of time it has become a bench mark in good journalism, as far as the Hills of Darjeeling are concerned. ☐



If there was one thing that you would want to change about yourself, what would it be???

"Nothing!! I am what I am."

-Sanjay Chettri, 19

"I want to change my inner self."

-Piyush Tamsang, 19

"Nothing because I am happy with myself."

-Poonam Pokhrel, 20

"I would like to change my past."

-Sunita Subba, 20

"Nothing I am satisfied with whatever God has given me."

-Chunila, 24

"I want to change my attitude."

-Nima Baraily, 19

"I want to control my anger."

-Yan Kumar Thapa, 34

"I will let others fulfill their wishes."

-Padam Bahadur Rai, 57

"I would love to exchange my eyes with Aishwarya's."

-Sunita Subba, 17

"I would want to be a good person."

-Pratika Chettri, 16

"I want to make my heart real strong to go back to all the people whom I have

hurt and beg for forgiveness."

-Eseal Mangrati, 17

"I have no idea what to change."

-Rahul Sharma, 12

"I just wish I could have my son back. I would give my life for it."

-Maya Tamrakar, 42

"I want to have the strength to say no when it gets too much."

-Grishma Onta, 26

"I want to be a complete mess."

-Angela, 26

"I wish I was a bachelor...hahaha."

-Tanmul Karki, 30

"I would want to change my career. Do something creative."

-Radharani Rai, 38

"I would want to be a mega mind."

-Pem Dorjee, 24

"I want to be more strong physically as well as mentally. I would love to kick ass like Angelina Jolie."

-Pratiksha Sharma, 23

"I want to be a bad guy as I am tired of being good which equals to being a loser!!!"

-Prabhat, 19

"I want to be more like Enrique...super hot with a voice to match."

-Zisha, 16

"I want to alter my profession and be a tattoo artist."

-Joshna, 20

"I would love to be a dancing DIVA!!!!"

-Rid zee, 19

"I want to gat my Korean girlfriend back."

-Sagar Chettri, 19

"I want to quit smoking."

-Sameer Thapa, 25

"I want to be an alcoholic to drown my pain."

-Pawan, 28

"I want to fly high in my thoughts."

-Trisha, 19

"I want to be a person who is down to earth."

-Jemimma Rai, 22

"I want to be more courageous."

-Supriya Pradhan, 20

"If I could go back in time I would say Sorry to my late sis-in law."

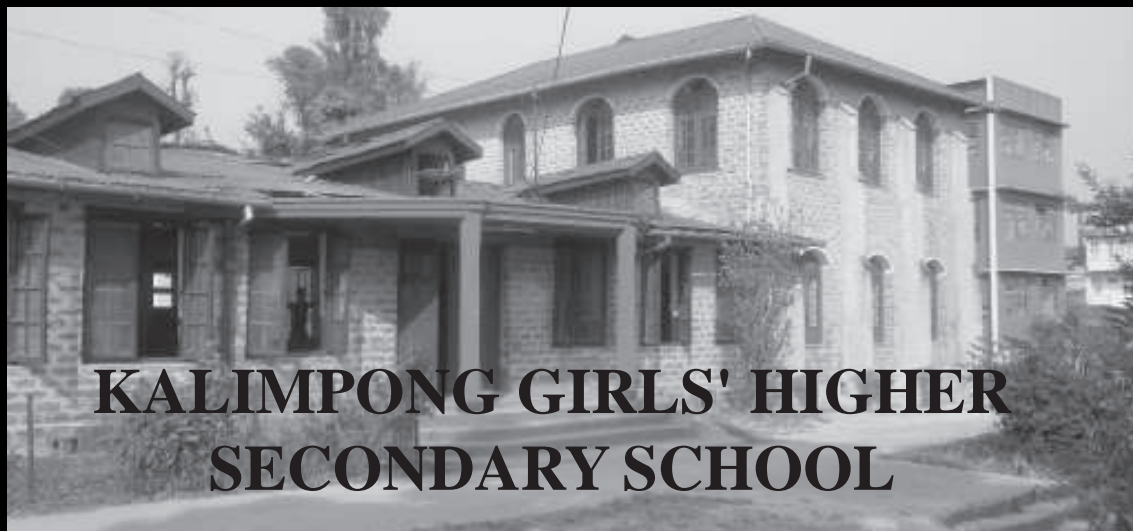
-Dippika, 25

"I would probably shorten my nose, its too long"

-Sushma Sharma, 21

"I would love to go back to school and relearn things that i missed while i was actually there."

-Ramesh, 37



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**Didn't I promise I would bring you water
after I'd win the elections????**



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THE HEART OF THE HAAT

By Prakriti Prabha Chettri

The super bustling and the continuous haggling makes the *Haat Bazaar* my most favourite place to shop in Kalimpong. Nothing can beat the authenticity that the *Haat* offers when it comes to street shopping. You will literally find everything under the sun, starting from the fresh green *saag* “just plucked in the morning”, to explicit lingerie. What can one not find there!!!! It offers a whole array of vegetables, clothes, decorative articles, souvenirs and many more to choose from. It has a special attraction of its own, one that infectious and bursting with life. Located in the heart of our quaint town, it is so easily accessible to both locals and tourists.

The main *Haat* days are Wednesdays and Saturdays, and in these days one can hardly find space to breathe and when one does find that space one's nose crinkles with the blended aroma of raw fish, *Kinema* and rubber slippers (especially if you enter the bazaar from the Parasmani Gate). The mercury also rises to an unbearable height and you sweat like a pig trying your best to choose the right sized potatoes and the freshest *saag*. But where is the fun without a little sweat!!! I'm sure all of you know the satisfaction of having



bought three big lemons for ten rupees due to your haggling despite sweat trickling down your nose, while your friend or maybe your neighbour got just two lemons for ten. It just feels so worth it!!

A long ribbon like stretch divides the *Haat* into two equal portions, well approximately (when have things been ever planned in our country). It is possible to find onions right next to a shop selling thongs yet there are separate corners for each variety of item. This is what is so fascinating. Divided yet together!!! The crudely raised platforms serve as open shops, so by the time dusk arrives everything is packed and the place seems deserted. You almost don't recognize it, but during the day it serves a place where no one can question your presence. You come there to shop!!! What else????

It might not be as convenient or as posh as the departmental stores that are springing up like monsoon mushrooms all over the district, especially Siliguri. You may not have shopping carts with wheels

to push around wide passages while dropping any item you want (arranged for you on the shelves in the most fastidious way) in these carts with such elegant moves. You may not have the picture

perfect controlled temperature. You may not have the luxury of having your debit card swiped. But what you will have is old wrinkled ladies with huge “dhungris” and “bulakis” on their noses who will sell you the best “ningro ko betta” with such sincere modesty. You will have people who look like as if they come from a different era, an era when man lived with nature, selling pure home made butter wrapped in leaves. You will have fresh green vegetables grown in a natural environment without any chemicals. All true gifts of nature!!!

The best time to shop for green groceries is early in the morning. You get the “bestest” of the best to choose from. And woof.... the *churpi* that you get early in the morning on Wednesdays and Saturdays sell like hot cakes!! Well if hot cakes are suppose to sell the quickest according to the English, our *churpis* can compete with that too!!!! They are so exquisite to taste and those of you who have never had *churpi* bought early in the morning in the *Haat* have indeed missed out the real *churpi*, which isn't sour but so milky and rich with a slight hint of fermentation. Life is indeed all about eating, loving and praying... Besides *churpis*, you also get the freshest organic vegetables early in the morning, which are brought by jeeps that ply to and fro from kalimpong and the local nearby busties. The rural folks all come happily in these jeeps that are so jam packed with green vegetables and people. Perfect combination of country life.

The flea clothes market is also a very important part of the *Haat*. The wide stretch has clothes that range from warm angora sweaters to cool satin night dresses. What is so beautiful about this open flea corner is the fact that it provides feather jackets for just 200 rupees for people who might not have had the opportunity or the means to own one(the same costs almost 3000 rupees when bought from a store). This particular corner in *Haat* actually ensures that everybody stays warm during winters. There is no match for the feather jackets and the warm soft woollen “track pants” that one gets there for a price that quite seals the hole in the pocket.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. There also seems to be a corner completely dedicated to ensure that men while away their time. I was amazed at the popularity of the carom game which seemed to go on endlessly in such progress, that there can be no comparison. It was like a maze of men aiming, swearing and spitting, each dying to prove better than the other. Men and their ego, always in need of constant massage!!!!

Ooo yes.. I mustn't forget the most famous *Gudiya didi ki doakan* that sells cakes and other bakery stuff made from pure homemade butter. The cream filled buns, the muffins and *Gudiya didi* are a real match made in heaven. It is almost enchanting. Besides sweetening your tooth one can also have great Nepali lunch in the few eateries that are located at the fringes.

Somehow I feel that all this unites us. It is something that we all Kpgians have in common. No matter which corner of Kalimpong we live in, no matter which caste or class we belong to, no matter what age, no matter what sex... we always end up with filling our tummies with the stuff bought at the *Haat*. You cannot deny that!!! It is indeed a unifying force, a central point where we all meet. At the end of the day no matter how much we claim to differ from each other there is always a bond that unites us. And in our case it is the heart of Kalimpong, the *Haat*. ☐

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Home (Tourism) Department, Government of West Bengal

This is a scanned copy of an advertisement that was printed on Page 118 of the Readers Digest in its Issue Dated October 1971. Why cannot the DGHC Tourism do today what the West Bengal Tourism used to do 42 long years back??



DivasanRichard Pakhrin

SILVER LINING

Never did I see the silver lining of situations
Which like thunder clouds hid the meanings

Within meaningless-ness, with no hope

Where despair is the only comfort

The only pillow to lay a burdened on

To rest and forget all

All the unanswered questions

Only answerable by a messiah

“Deliver us Lord” I utter on behalf

Of an issue not alien to anyone

Varied and vestigial

“From every evil” not really trusting

Myself stuttering, and the proposed lamb

Because I’ve not yet gathered the resolve

To forgive my “trespassers”

Ones who have repeatedly “trespassed against” me and us

The mists have had us confused

“Led us into temptation”

We’ve been forsaken by denial

Of self, in search of individual “daily breads”

And “the kingdom” that has “come”

Without “thy will” needs to be undone

To restore, what we have lost

For thy name to be “hallowed”

For if “thine is the kingdom”

“The power and the glory” that I don’t wield

Show us the path “on earth”

“As it is in...” if there is a “heaven”

A “father” responsible to his progeny

“Holy be your name”, that is the probable

Silver lining behind my dark-cloud

That “an epoch of incredulity is also the epoch of belief”

GORKHA APHRODITE

Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of love does not just symbolize beauty but is also considered an epitome of many vices as well as virtues in the Greek Mythology. If she were to exist in reality no man would be perfect for her and she would refuse all the wanna be grooms and choose to remain single.

Anyway that is vague talk, what is more crucial here is the fact that she has been the ultimate symbol of feminism internationally like the image of Goddess Durga here in India. But there is one difference, Durga symbolizes "shakti" in the most divine and powerful way that one can imagine while Aphrodite is more related to love and sex, something that we all as humans can relate to.

Aphrodite has been a source of inspiration for all artists. There have been numerous poems and paintings of her all around the world. The month of April is supposed to have been named after her, thus dedicating the season of spring and new awaking in nature solely to this beautiful Goddess. It provides a strong proof of her hold and victory as a female figure.

Well, Greece and Greek Mythology is far away from Kalimpong, but all the credit goes to the writers, thinkers and most importantly to the inventors of the "just can't live without it" internet. Anything you want is just a click away. It is such a wonderful source of communication because it creates a bridge that cuts across the world bringing us closer to all different communities and people and their traditions and customs. The saddest part is that it has affected the "book mania" and gradually those piles of books on the shelves of libraries have started gathering dust.

And as I type "Aphrodite" on the google search, there is this whole list of things that pops up blaringly on the screen. Apart from the general information given by wikipedia, there is this whole "other" list ranging from travel agencies to pornography. (Internet just like



everything has its disadvantages too). But why should we click at the mouse to understand the depth of Aphrodite. Lets us just forget the rest of the world and just focus on our own Aphrodite. Our own Gorkha *chelis* or Gorkha Aphrodites.

Well in my opinion our Gorkha women are the perfect example of Aphrodites. There is a picture perfect blend of beauty and brains in our Gorkha woman along with immense quantity of love. The Gorkha community is such that it allows its women an independent self of her own. She is allowed to choose her own path and even allowed to marry whomsoever she chooses, which of course she does for love.

The world that we are surrounded by has become so cruel to the women. Evils like female infanticide, rape and harassment for dowry have become so common. We here in Kalimpong have to a huge extent remained free from such evils. The respect that women get here is something that the entire world should learn from. We the "Gorkha Aphrodites" are allowed to be whom we actually are i.e. symbol of love, and this is what should always be maintained. We should always remember that women are all replicas of Goddesses and an epitome of beauty and love.

Maybe some of our women folk here have never heard of the Goddess Aphrodite. But does it really matter!!! What our women know is to love... To love as a grandmother, mother, daughter, granddaughter, sister, niece and so on. And if the love they shower is returned to them as well, the world will be the happiest place to live. ☐



ORGANIC FARMING

Dr. Dhiman Mukherjee

SUSTAINABLE HILL AGRICULTURE THROUGH ORGANIC FARMING

Dr. Dhiman Mukherjee



ADVANTAGES OF ORGANIC FARMING

ü The economics of organic farming is characterized by increasing profits via reduced water use, nutrient-contamination by pesticides, reduced soil erosion and carbon emissions and increased biodiversity.

ü Organic farming produces the same crop variants as those produced via conventional farming methods,

but incurs 50% lower expenditure on fertilizer and energy, and retains 40% more topsoil.

ü This type of farming effectively addresses soil management. Even damaged soil, subject to erosion and salinity, are able to feed on micro-nutrients via crop rotation, inter-cropping techniques and the extensive use of green manure.

ü Farming the organic way enables farmers to get rid of irksome weeds without the use of any mechanical and chemical applications. Practices such as hand-weeding and soil enhancement with mulch, corn gluten meal, garlic and clove oil, table salt and borax not only get rid of weeds and insects, but also guarantee crop quality.

ü The use of green pesticides such as neem, compost tea and spinosad is environmentally friendly and non-toxic. These pesticides help in identifying and removing diseased and dying plants in time and subsequently, increasing crop defense systems.

HEALTHY SOILS FROM ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Capturing the benefits of soil biological activity for agricultural production requires adhering to the following ecological principles:

v Supply organic matter: Each type of soil organism occupies a different niche in the web of life and favours a different substrate and nutrient source. Most soil organisms rely on organic matter for food; thus a rich supply and varied source of organic matter will generally support a wider variety of organisms.

v Increase plant varieties_: Crops should be mixed and their spatial-temporal distribution varied, to create a greater diversity of niches and resources that stimulate soil biodiversity. For example diverse habitats support complex mixes of soil organisms, and through crop rotation or inter-cropping, it is possible to encourage the presence of a wider variety of organisms, improve nutrient cycling and natural processes of pest and disease control.

v Protect the habitat of soil organisms: The activity of soil biodiversity can be stimulated by improving soil living conditions, such as aeration, temperature, moisture, and nutrient quantity and quality. In this regard, reduced soil tillage and minimized compaction - and refraining chemical use - are of particular note.

Improvement in agricultural sustainability requires, alongside effective water and crop management, the optimal use and management of soil fertility and soil physical properties.

Dilemmas dominate the life of hill peoples and farmers. They have immense capacity to endure hardships -natural or man-made. Their farming wisdom remains unchallenged despite technological advancements. Intensification of agriculture through massive adoption of high yielding cultivation, increased use of synthetic inputs like chemical fertilizers and pesticides, greater exploitation of irrigation potentiality of surface and ground water resources and farm mechanization have largely been responsible for a spectacular achievement in the food grain production that we have achieved over past three decades. Paradoxically however overexploitation of natural and renewable resources and indiscriminate and irrational use of synthetic inputs like inorganic fertilizers and pesticides in view of producing more and more from unit piece of land are being increasingly realized to seriously impair the ecological balance and putting the hill environment in jeopardy

Both rely on soil biological processes and soil biodiversity. This calls for the widespread adoption of management practices that enhance soil biological activity and thereby build up long-term soil productivity and health hill environment.

Adaptation and further development of soil biodiversity management into sustainable land management practices requires solutions that pay adequate consideration to the synergies between the soil ecosystem and its productive capacity and agro-ecosystem health. One practical example of holistic agricultural management systems that promote and enhance agro-ecosystem health, including biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity is organic agriculture in Darjeeling –Sikkim Himalaya.

COMPONENTS OF ORGANIC FARMING

There are assumptions throughout the organic literature of differences between organic and conventional systems with respect to their effects on soil physical properties, soil insect fauna and nutrient flow within the soil, crop health and nutritional value of the harvested crop. Different components of organic farming are as follows:

1. Crop and soil management

Organic farming system encourages the use of rotations and measures to maintain soil fertility. Carefully managed soil with a high production of humus offer essential advantages with respect to water retention ion exchange, soil erosion and animal life in the soil. Green manuring and inter-cropping of legumes is another important aspect for biological farming systems not only in regard to weed control but also in reducing the leaching of nutrients and in reducing soil erosion. A green cover throughout most of the year is one of the main goals of such farming methods. Depending on the green manure mixture or the legumes used for under sowing, there may be an increased soil organic

matter and soil N₂ as well as in other nutrients.

2. On-farm waste recycling

Increase price of chemical fertilizers have enables organic wastes to regain an important role in the fertilizer practices on the farm. Good manure management means improved fertilizers value of manure and slurry and less nutrient losses. Composting of all organic wastes in general and of Farm Yard Manure (FYM) or feedlot manure in particular is important in organic farming.

3. Non-chemical weed management

Weed management is one of the main concerns in organic agriculture. Generally, all aspects of arable crop production play an important role in a system approach to problems. The elements to consider in preventing weed problems are crop rotation, green manuring, manure management and tillage. Mulching on a large scale by using manure spreaders may also be useful in weed control.

4. Domestic waste recycling

Sewage and sludge and kitchen waste use for crop production, can form an important component of organic farming if treatment and application methods are improved further.

5. Ecological agriculture

The growing concern about environmental degradation, dwindling natural resources and urgency to meet the food needs of the increasing population are compelling farm scientist and policy makers to seriously examine alternative to chemical agriculture. As per report studies shows that when chemical farm incurred about 11.250 towards the cost of cultivation of rice. An organic farm spend rupees 10,590 to produce 5625 kg paddy and 8 tonnes of straw/ha. The net returns from the ecological farming system at the current cost of rupees 3.34/kg paddy is rupees 8,197.50. In chemical farming, the net profit is rupees 7500. If one gets a premium price for the poison force, organically grown rice, the economic returns from the ecological farming system will highly encouraging.

Packages for the development of organic farming in hilly region

The following priorities areas for research and development under organic farming as a package in are given below:

- Ø Research priorities for formulating organic farming practices should be framed by National Agriculture Research Agencies.
- Ø Establishment of national centre for organic farming will be useful in undertaking and coordinating basic research on organic farming systems.
- Ø Development of pesticides of plant origin (eg. neem) and use of bioagents especially under IPM systems need to be promoted.
- Ø Linkages between the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India and other NGOs sector, need strengthening in respect of developing organic farming systems.
- Ø University and other organic farming related institutes should be restructured their courses on organic farming.
- Ø Incentives for production of good quality organic manure, bio-pesticides, bio-fertilizers and green manuring crops may be considered.
- Ø Encourage the visit of farmers to model organic farms, organic seminars, workshops, conferences and lectures to create awareness regarding the improvement component of organic farming.
- Ø The indiscriminate use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides need to be discouraged.
- Ø Steps are needed to avoid hazardous chemical residues in feeds, fodder, food products and milk.
- Ø Develop marketing infrastructure for organically produced commodities.
- Ø Financial marketing can come forward to provide appropriate support. ▣



THE COOKING DIARIES

By Prakriti
Prabha Chettri

April may have literally poured cold water to all the Easter weekend picnic plans to Relli and fishing plans to Reshi to a despairing level. But despite the very funny weather I was immensely pleased to be invited by my aunt to an Easter Sunday dinner. After all Easter is not just about the extended weekend spree but more about family bonding and celebrating the resurrection of Christ in the most joyous way possible, spreading love and happiness.

My aunt alias Mrs Alphonse Brahmin loves food. Her round and rosy figure is enough proof of that. Had she to wear a floral printed knee length dress of vintage orientation and do her hair in a Marilyn Munroe style she would definitely look like a character straight out of Enid Blyton books. Her husband and my uncle may not equal to my aunt in size but he sure does equal in kindness. But yes, they are the happiest couple I know and spending time with them in Siliguri is always like a vacation. All fun and no work!!!!

My aunt had planned an evening of barbeque. I love onomatopoeic words and “sizzling” is one of them. And barbeque and sizzling go hand in hand along with smoke and wine and “dalley” sauce and cheese (the local homemade cheese of Kalimpong is the ticket to my aunt’s heart) and lemons and the list goes on.... but one must ensure that the meat is slightly boiled to avoid eating undercooked barbequed slices. I’m sure you don’t want “worming” difficulties.

My aunt had boiled the meat first and had sliced it accordingly. Then all she did was lay the sliced pieces over the burning coal. What is so charming about a barbeque is the fact that the burning fire of the barbeque on the varanda or the garden puts you into a state of warm solace. The purple haze of smoke, the sound of sizzling, the taste of ageless old wine (I would like to imagine that it was quite old, very, very old) and the laughing and chattering of family and friends all around you is a source of such joy and comfort. We shared stories of the past along with the ageless old wine. My uncle then sang songs of Narayan Gopal and

we began to listen to him lost in our own thoughts...of forgotten memories and it began to rain outside..... the fragrance of moist air mingled with the smoke and beautiful mellow voice of my uncle created an atmosphere of perfect history. Something so old and forgotten...



Then the spell of the past was broken by the announcement of the dinner being served in the dinning room. There was plain rice, fluffy white and steaming like a volcano. There was chicken cooked in the most special way by my aunt. The chicken was first marinated in yoghurt and garlic ginger paste for half an hour and then the pieces were baked in the oven for a while to give it a crusty look while maintaining the juiciness inside. Then it was cooked in medium heat with onions, tomatoes and spices. And it was delicious. It is the pre baking of the marinated chicken that gives it a unique flavour. Another trick (I was the one to teach my aunt this trick too) is to dust some oregano once it is cooked. Oregano is a herb (used in pastas as well as pizzas) that is easily available at departmental stores that sell foreign cooking items. It is an absolute appetizing flavour and is always a hit. Trust me!!! You will fall in love with oregano. Its French after all.. and French equals to Paris and Paris equals to love..

Then there was my all time favourite (my aunt ensures that I make it each time she has people over for dinner) boiled potatoes made into a salad with ground sesame seeds or groundnut. I prefer the latter because roasting the former is very challenging and quite ruining at times. This is a common Nepalese item which I am sure most of you know about. I just added ground peanuts, raw sliced onions, pepper, salt, “dalley” paste and poured heated mustard oil as well as fresh lemon juice and gave it a good mix. And it became an

authentic delicacy good enough to be served to a queen. (I’m not too sure about serving a chef because he might not comment in my favour for the sheer fear of competition) I hate to admit it, but I’m a narcissist.

There was also the “Rambi ko cheuw” cooked with cheese. My family and I are crazy for cheese. Then there was fried fish. It was just deep fried in mustard oil with salt and tumeric powder. And my aunt had also prepared some lettuce salad in just olive oil and pepper. Is that it??? Hmm..let me think..... Oh yes, there were a few more things too.....lots of love, gossips (healthy ones) warm smiles and contagious laughter. They are the most special of all the ingredients in life.

The dessert was simple. Easter cake with ice cream. Each scoop melted in the mouth along with the mushy cake. Each time I talk of dessert I always think of Indra Bahadur Rai and his story “*kheer*”. Dessert and the story “*kheer*” are inseparable to me. But yes, it was all heavenly. Good food is indeed the best way to relax and have fun. It is the best way to bond. I completely believe that life is all about eating, loving and praying.

In my last writing of “The Cooking Diaries” I had said that from the next time I’d like to have great company and great food. And it was exactly what happened. I got to have the best time of my life with the best people in the world.. My own family.. I must confess that it was the best Easter weekend that I had ever had. .. It will always be embedded in my memory and will always make me smile..... reminds me of “ Charlie and the chocolate factory” where Charlie a ten year old poor boy chooses his poor family and his ram shackled tiny home that can barely keep the cold out over the biggest chocolate factory in the world.

The purpose of eating together is about sharing happiness and joy along with lovely home cooked food. But as they say, “no rose is without a thorn”, but despite the thorn, a rose will always be a rose.... Time may pass, one may not be happy forever but till one is one should ensure that one spreads happiness wherever one goes. Because when the moment of grief attacks one may be surprised by the way one’s happiness is returned in the time most needed.

Till my next invite...Bon appetite ☐

Arack/Raksi:

Our's and Their's



Dr. Sonam B. Wangyel

Last week was the New Year week and a lot of booze, or in the local parlance *arack* and *raksi*, must have traveled down the revelers' throats. These two words are so common in our hills that we tend to suppose they have been with us ever since the discovery of alcohol. But that supposition is not true for the words are not indigenous to our tranquil hills. The word *arack* comes to us from the Arabic 'arak which initially meant perspiration and later changed to exudation, e.g. 'arak *al-tamar*, the sap drawn from the date palm (c/f *tadi* in India, which has a strong alcohol content). It evolved eventually to stand for any strong drink, distilled spirit, essence etc. The word *raksi* most probably came from Manchuria-Mongolia region where 'arak had transformed itself to *ariki* and *arki* and by the time it reached the Himalayan kingdoms it had become *arak* in Bhutan and Tibet and (*a*-)*raksi* in Nepal. A phonetically strong, but an unlikely, contender to that is the *Turkish râki*. Anyway, whether it is *raksi*, *arack*, or *râki* it finally boils down to one product, alcohol. Alcohol, as an English word has very strange history. Its descent takes us to the Arabic compound word *al-kuhl* or the antimony powder used as a cosmetic to darken the eyelids. Around the first two decades of the 1600s CE the meaning began to change from the powder to an intoxicating liquid. Alcohol then came to mean a product obtained by sublimation and this process required heating, condensing, and bottling of the condensate and the final potion so obtained was considered a quintessential creation, the purest and most perfect form of that which was heated earlier. This led to the supposition that *alcohol of wine* was the 'quintessence of wine'. By about a bit over two centuries other inebriating ingredients of different

manufacture, taste and strength also came to be called 'alcohol': they were after all performing the same job.

Moving away from our immediate surroundings we will travel in time and distance to arrive in Leiden, Holland, of the 17th century. Franciscus Sylvius, the professor of medicine at the University of Leiden was researching on a cheap drug that would induce diuresis, or extra flow of urine. He landed up producing gin, which did what he hoped would do but it also held a serious side-effect, intoxication. Being cheap it became a very popular drink which also led to excessive consumption and expectedly to street brawls and so developed the term 'Dutch courage'. The name gin comes from French *genièvre* altered by the Dutch to *genever* and shortened by the Englishmen to 'gin'. Incidentally, gin or *genièvre* refers to the juniper berry and it is the principal flavouring ingredient in this spirit. The Dutch are once again in the glare in the etymology of 'brandy'. It comes from *branbdewijn* meaning burnt wine, an allusion to the application of heat in the distillation process. The word underwent an easy makeover to 'brandewine' followed by 'brandy wine' and finally to the condensed 'brandy'.

We now move to Scotland, the home of Scotch Whisky. Note that it is not 'whiskey' with an 'e' for Scotch is always spelt in the shorter form, whisky. There is an unwritten convention that Scotch be minus the 'e', and all others with an 'e' (whiskey) save for the distillate from Canada since almost the entire industry there was set up by Scotsmen. Even the Irish spirit which is also of top quality, is spelt with an 'e'. Traditionally then, all others are or should be 'whiskey' but we in South Asia, including Bhutan, are hardly bothered with this unwritten convention and our distillers rampantly spell it the way the Scots do even when the grog is only a rung better than the homespun *arak/raksi*. The word whisk(e)y comes from Gaelic *uisge beatha* (Celtic *usquebaugh*, Irish Gaelic *uisce beathadh* and Scots Gaelic *uisge betha*) and stands for 'water of life' (*uisge* water and *beatha* life). The French, not to be outdone, have *eau de vie* for their brandy with an identical meaning, 'water of life'.

It is bad enough that we South Asians have breached the sanctity of the spelling our 'malt' distillate as 'whisky' but we also put to waste the time honoured style of drinking it: for some inexplicable reasons we normally add 'rock (ice) on the whisk(e)y' and proclaim it 'whisk(e)y on the rocks' and that is injustice especially if you are downing Scotch. The rock has to lie in waiting at the bottom of the glass and the whisky must slowly bathe and overcome it in order for it to become 'whisky on the rocks'.

Finally we move to the West Indies where the best rum is to be found. The exact etymology eludes us but there are broad hints as to how this distillate from sugarcane got that name. One of the earliest mentions goes to a manuscript of 1661 in Trinity College, Dublin, where in describing Barbados in general there is a mention of a sugarcane spirit called *rumbullion* with *kill-devil* as an alias. Rum therefore seems to be an abbreviated version. *Rumbullion* is a Devonshire word, meaning 'a great tumult,' and it is likely that the Devonshire settlers in Barbados, after several healthy swigs of the spirit, had a great tumultuous experience and therefore had a hand in christening the spirit so.

Before we leave these distant shores two street words, booze and grog, will be probed. The Dutch are once again in the scene with their *bûsen* (drink much alcohol) from which English in the 13th century took on a distorted *bouse* (rhyming with 'house') and about three hundred years later took the pronunciation closer to the original, the Dutch root, to come up with 'booze'. The word 'grog' has a story of its own. A British admiral named Edward Vernon in 1740 introduced the practice of serving rum and water to his sailors instead of the customary neat shots. Edward was a man who loved his grogram (coarse fabric) coat and since he was always attired in grogram the sailors nicknamed him 'Old Grogram' and whenever the seamen drank 'rum and water' it was referred to as 'grog'. Grog today has taken up wider responsibility of representing any intoxicating distillate. So on this groggy note let me sign off for now. ☐



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